

**Draft**  
**Environmental Assessment**  
**RUSSELL GATES MEMORIAL FAS**  
**SITE IMPROVEMENT PROJECT**



**October 2009**



***Montana Fish,  
Wildlife & Parks***

**Russell Gates Memorial FAS Site Improvement Project**  
**Draft Environmental Assessment**  
**MEPA, NEPA, MCA 23-1-110 CHECKLIST**

**PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION**

1. **Proposed state action:** Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes site improvements at the Russell Gates Memorial Fishing Access Site (FAS) including creating a day use parking area with up to 30 parking spaces, building a new gravel boat ramp, installing a vault latrine, as well as revegetation and stabilization of the river bank. The existing pioneered boat ramps and pioneered parking areas will be reclaimed. The proposed work will provide better separation of the day use and camping while protecting riparian vegetation and reducing human caused sedimentation into the Blackfoot River. The purpose of the proposed project is to accommodate public recreational use of the site and to stabilize and restore the riverbank to prevent further degradation along this stretch of river.

2. **Agency authority for the proposed action:** The 1977 Montana Legislature enacted statute 87-1-605, Montana Code Annotated (MCA), which directs FWP to acquire, develop and operate a system of fishing accesses. FWP has the authority to develop outdoor recreational resources in the state per 23-2-101, MCA: *"for the purpose of conserving the scenic, historic, archaeologic, scientific, and recreational resources of the state and providing their use and enjoyment, thereby contributing to the cultural, recreational, and economic life of the people and their health."*

Furthermore, state statute 23-1-110 MCA and ARM 12.2.433 guides public involvement and comment for the improvements at state parks and fishing access sites, which this document provides. ARM 21.8.602 requires the Department to consider the wishes of users and the public, the capacity of the site for development, environmental impacts, long-range maintenance, protection of natural features and impacts on tourism as these elements relate to development or improvement to fishing access sites or state parks. This document will illuminate the facets of the proposed project in relation to this rule. See Appendix 1 for HB 495 qualification.

3. **Name of project:** Russell Gates Memorial FAS Site Improvement Project

4. **Project sponsor:** Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks Region 2  
3201 Spurgin Road  
Missoula, MT 59804  
406-542-5500

5. **Anticipated Timeline:**
- |  |  |
|--|--|
| Estimated Construction/Commencement Date:      | Spring 2010 for parking and ramp work<br>Fall 2010 for bank stabilization and vegetation |
| Estimated Completion Date:                     | Summer 2010 for parking and ramp work<br>Fall 2010 for bank stabilization and vegetation |
| Current Status of Project Design (% complete): | 10%  |

6. **Location:** Russell Gates Memorial FAS is located along the Blackfoot River 36 miles east of Bonner at 49437 Highway 200 East Greenough MT 59823. It is located within Township 15 North, Range 14 West, Section 25 in Missoula County. The FAS is situated in the Blackfoot valley between the Swan range to the north and the Garnet range to the south. See Figures 1 and 2 for highway and aerial maps.



Figure 1: Russell Gates Memorial FAS Location

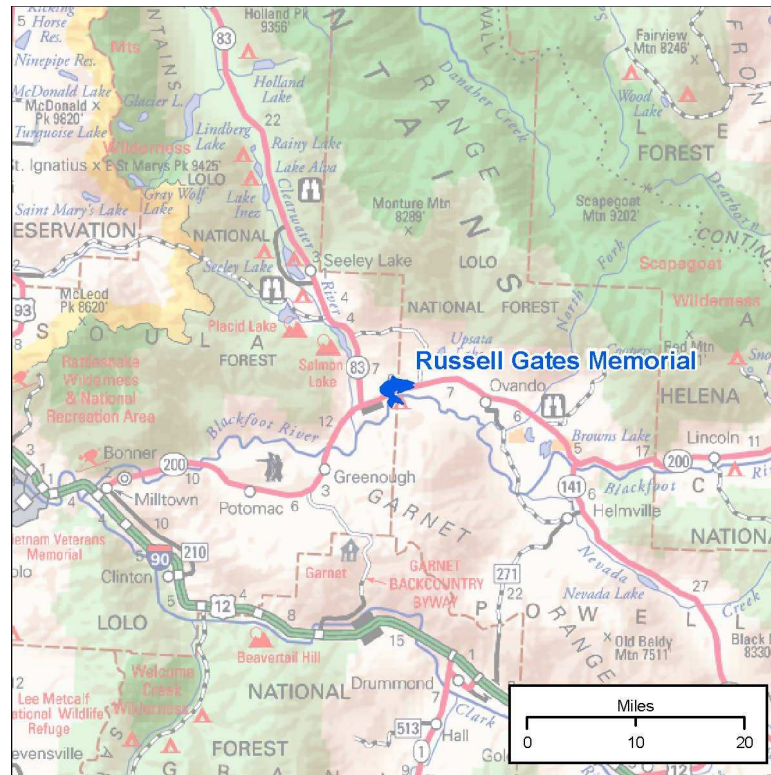
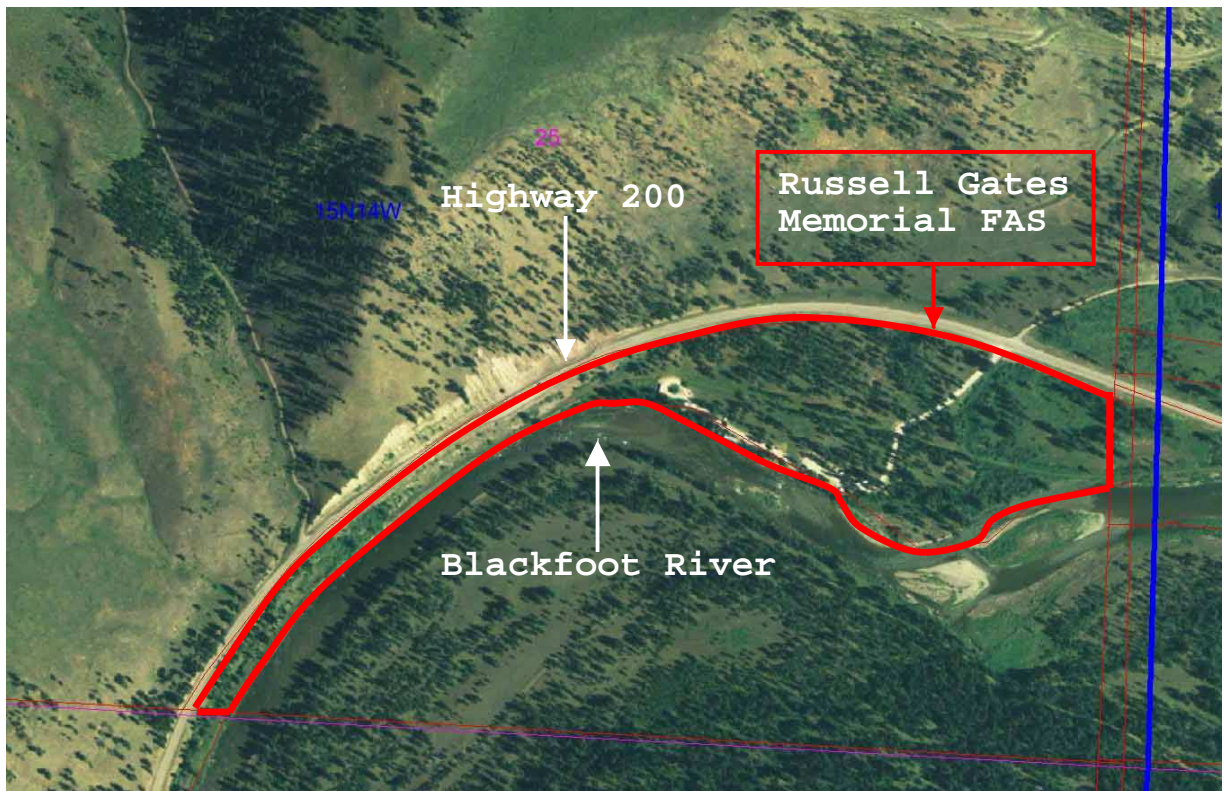


Figure 2: Russell Gates Memorial FAS Aerial View



**7. Project size:**

	<u>Acres</u>		<u>Acres</u>
(a) Developed:		(d) Floodplain/Riparian	<u>&lt; 1</u>
Residential	<u>0</u>		
Industrial	<u>0</u>	(e) Productive:	
		Irrigated cropland	<u>0</u>
(b) Open Space/Woodlands/Recreation	<u>1</u>	Dry cropland	<u>0</u>
		Forestry	<u>0</u>
(c) Riparian Wetlands Areas	<u>    </u>	Rangeland	<u>0</u>
		Other	<u>0</u>

**8. Local, State or Federal agencies with overlapping or additional jurisdiction:**

- a) Permits:** Permits will be filed 60 days prior to work

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Permit</u>
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP)	124 MT Stream Protection Act
Montana Dept. of Environmental Quality	318 Short Term Water Quality Standard for Turbidity
US Corps of Engineers	404 Federal Clean Water Act
Missoula County	Floodplain Permit & Septic Permit

- b) Funding:** Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks FAS Development \$150,000

- c) Other Overlapping or Additional Jurisdictional Responsibilities:**

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Type of Responsibility</u>
Natural Heritage Program	Species of Concern (See Appendix 2)
State Historic Preservation Office	Cultural Clearance (See Appendix 3)
US Fish & Wildlife Service	Bald & Golden Eagle Protection Act
US Fish & Wildlife Service	Migratory Bird Treaty Act
Montana Bald Eagle Working Group	Montana Bald Eagle Management Plan

**1. Narrative summary of the proposed action:**

This project proposes several site improvements at the Russell Gates Memorial (FAS) including the development of up to 30 parking spaces, a new gravel boat ramp and vault latrine, as well as revegetation and stabilization of the riverbank. The site currently has 11 campsites, two-pioneered boat ramps, two vault latrines and limited parking with four established parking spaces for day-use. The existing pioneered boat ramps will be reclaimed with an improved gravel boat ramp added in a better location. Day use parking will be re-directed to a designated parking area to eliminate the indiscriminate parking that occurs along the road. The proposed work will provide better separation of the day use area and the designated camping area, while providing protections for the eagle nest in the area. The purpose of the proposed project is to develop a designated parking area and to redirect use to preserve native vegetation and to stabilize the riverbank preventing further degradation along this stretch of river. Montana FWP would like to provide continued public access to area anglers, floaters, boaters and campers during construction, thus the work is proposed in two phases. The parking lot and boat ramp work in the spring of 2010 and the stabilization and revegetation done in the fall of 2010 to accommodate low water flows. The exact timing of the work will depend on the design, bidding and water flows.

This site is a popular take out for floaters. With only four established parking spaces at Russell Gates, the FAS will often contain 40+ vehicles with trailers on many summer weekends and over 65 vehicles have been parked along the road at any one time on the



busiest weekends. Proposed parking improvements will ease the parking congestion in this area, which will increase safety, reduce dust and will prevent further degradation of the vegetation. The high human use of this site is degrading the riparian vegetation and combined with the force of the water in the river channel, the riverbank is eroding away the soil and vegetation. Along the river wetland vegetation includes various willow species, alder, aspen, birch, cottonwoods, wild roses, snowberry, silverberry, serviceberry, red osier dogwood, sedges and grasses. The loss of native riparian vegetation has led to bank erosion at the project site, contributing sediment to downstream waters. Accelerated erosion at the site is largely a function of intensive human use (overuse/abuse) of the riverbank. This use contributes to loss of woody vegetation (the natural stabilizing force), which contributes to unnatural accelerated erosion of the riverbank. Stabilization of the Blackfoot River along approximately 180 linear yards is proposed, if funding is available. See Figure 3 below for the bank erosion. See Appendix 6 for the draft preliminary concept site plan.

Figure 3 Russell Gates Memorial FAS Eroded Riverbank



Recent surveys conducted by FWP show that the Blackfoot River supports over 33,000 angler days per year, with an average of over 12,000 angler days per year in the stretch from the Clearwater River to the North Fork of the Blackfoot, where Russell Gates Memorial FAS is located (river miles 39.6 - 40.5). Game fish opportunities in the river include brown trout, mountain whitefish, rainbow trout, and westslope cutthroat trout.

In addition to angling, the Russell Gates Site also provides access to some of the best white water opportunities in the Blackfoot. High flows on the Blackfoot create challenging class II & III white water attracting both private and commercial use. In extreme high water, other rivers like the Alberton Gorge on the lower Clark Fork become too dangerous and much of that white water use shifts over to the Blackfoot at the Russell Gates Site. As is currently in effect, FWP Commercial Use Rules for commercial outfitters who use the site for river access and the Special Recreation Permit (SRP) permitting commercial, competitive and organized groupings will continue to apply for use of the Blackfoot River. Several options are evaluated in this environmental assessment as described next.

## 2. Alternatives:

### A. No Action Alternative:

If no action is taken, users of this site will continue to park haphazardly and degrade current vegetation along the road and around the trees, and the bank vegetation will continue to erode and the sloughing banks will continue to add sediment into the river and lateral erosion will continue to threaten campsites and the access road to the campsites at Russell Gates Memorial FAS. Furthermore, the likelihood that the road and campsites along the river could be lost over several years of heavy scouring is a possibility. If this were to happen, FWP would have to close off the lost section of road. This alternative would leave the longevity of the site in continual question.

### B. Alternative B: Develop Downstream Boat Ramp:

This alternative would provide fewer parking spaces than Alternative C and the gravel boat ramp would be downstream of the existing campsites. This alternative would provide more distance between the established eagle nest and the boat ramp and would provide more vegetative cover between the boating activities and the nesting site. However, this alternative costs significantly more than the proposed preferred alternative, due to the additional work required to add a road and to protect known cultural sites at this location. Furthermore, this alternative would not provide the bank stabilization work due to the higher costs of the work necessary at this downstream location, not meeting all the objectives as well as the preferred Alternative C.

Alternative B Cost Estimate for Downstream Site \$220,000.

### C. Proposed Alternative C: Preferred Alternative: Develop Upstream Boat Ramp:

The preferred alternative will develop approximately 30 designated parking spaces to protect the native vegetation and will replace and reclaim the pioneered boat ramps with a new gravel boat ramp in a better location, as well as stabilize and revegetate along the riverbank. The proposed work will also provide better separation of the day use area and the designated camping area adding a new vault latrine. This alternative meets guidelines for eagle nesting security. See Appendix 6 for the preliminary concept plan for this preferred upstream alternative.

Currently the project budget is \$150,000 and the preferred alternative is within that budget and best meets the objectives to accommodate the numbers of users of the site and to preserve and to stabilize the riverbank to prevent further degradation along this stretch of river as well as provide better separation of the day use area and the designated camping area.

Alternative C Preferred Alternative Cost Estimate for Upstream Site \$150,000.

The other alternative discussed was considered and rejected as preferred since it exceeds the funding budget available, but is presented and considered as an option that provides greater distance from a known eagle nest and still provides additional parking to accommodate the high use of this site. Selecting a more costly alternative will require finding alternative sources of funding which would likely mean canceling or delaying other capital projects within the statewide FAS program. This analysis does not address other funding alternatives but the agency's decision will take into account a cost/benefit analysis and public comment when selecting an alternative.

**3. Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency:**

There is mitigation associated with the proposed actions for protection of the bald eagle nest in the area. While Bald eagles were officially delisted in 2007, the US Fish and Wildlife Service have jurisdiction protecting this species under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act (BGEPA) and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA). At the state level, the Montana Bald Eagle Working Group was formed in 1982 and is composed of representatives from federal and state agencies, tribes, universities, conservation groups, and private industry. In 1994 the group developed a "Montana Bald Eagle Management Plan" to provide information and guide landowners and resource managers in conserving eagle habitat.

A bald eagle nest is located approximately ¼ mile upstream from the Russell Gates FAS. The resident pair of eagles has used this nest site since 1994. This pair of eagles has been monitored since 1979. To avoid disturbance to these eagles, modifications to the Russell Gates FAS has been designed to 1) not increase human activity levels in the area upstream of the FAS, especially during the February-July breeding and nesting season, 2) discourage foot traffic from the FAS along the river upstream towards the eagle nest, 3) maintain the vegetative screening in the upland bench area between the nest and the FAS, 4) maintain and increase the vegetative screening along the river shoreline between the proposed boat launch and the eagle nest, and 5) time certain construction activities to avoid disturbing the bald eagle nest when active.

To accomplish this, the new parking areas and the boat ramp have been placed in such a way to minimize the amount of vegetation that needs to be removed. Signs and fencing (when/where appropriate) will be placed along the upstream edge of the boat launch area to protect the vegetation from trampling by discouraging people from walking upstream along the shoreline. These would be placed in such a way as to not create hazards to floaters during high water. Also, future bank restoration efforts will include additional cottonwood and willow planting in the area upstream from the boat launch, to provide additional screening between human activities and the eagle nest. Construction schedules will avoid sensitive areas in view of the eagles during nesting and fledging stages. In addition monitoring of eagle activities may be conducted before, during and after construction.

There are also control measures associated with the proposed actions for decreasing the impacts of the construction work during the stabilization of the riverbank and ramp construction.

At this site, the river has eroded into the bank and mobilized several hundred cubic yards of soil into the Blackfoot over the last several years, with estimated loss of 1-2 feet of bank per year since 1996. Accelerated erosion at the site is largely a function of intensive human use (overuse/abuse) of the riverbank. This use contributes to loss of woody vegetation (the natural stabilizing force), which contributes to unnatural accelerated erosion of the riverbank. Repair and stabilization of the riverbank will prevent future accelerated erosion at this location and will prevent loss of campsites and will protect the access road to the campsites.

Control measures include timing the earthwork to coincide with the period of lowest flow (August, September) to minimize bed-load transport of redistributed bank materials and of channel materials during the stabilization. Construction of the revetment during low flow means that any materials mobilized into the stream channel would have minimum energy for transport. Thus, while sediment will be mobilized, only the silt, clay, and fine sand sized particles will move any distance downstream and, it is unlikely these particles will travel more than 200-300 yards before dropping out.

## PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW CHECKLIST

Evaluation of the impacts of the Proposed Alternatives including secondary and cumulative impacts on the Physical and Human Environment.

### A. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

1. <u>LAND RESOURCES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. **Soil instability or changes in geologic substructure?			X			1a.
b. Disruption, displacement, erosion, compaction, moisture loss, or over-covering of soil, which would reduce productivity or fertility?			X		YES Positive	1b.
c. **Destruction, covering or modification of any unique geologic or physical features?		X				1c.
d. Changes in siltation, deposition or erosion patterns that may modify the channel of a river or stream or the bed or shore of a lake?			X		YES	1d.
e. Exposure of people or property to earthquakes, landslides, ground failure, or other natural hazard?		X				

- 1a. Soil and geologic substructure will remain stable during and after the proposed work. Bank stabilization will help ensure soil stability along the bank for Alternative C. If no action is taken (Alternative A) or if Alternative B is chosen continued erosion may lead to soil instability and changes geologic substructure.
- 1b. The proposed stabilization in Alternative C is intended to stop the eroding bank so the project will have a positive impact by reducing sediment delivery into the river. Stream bank erosion is a natural and healthy function of the river, but the stabilization is necessary to protect the existing road and campsites. Informative signs would be posted to encourage the recovery of the riparian vegetative community. Accelerated erosion at the site is largely a function of intensive human use, which contributes to loss of woody vegetation and leads to unnatural accelerated erosion of the riverbank. If no action is taken, accelerated erosion would continue. Due to the higher costs of Alternative B, funding is not available for the stabilization work and erosion would continue.

Furthermore, the uncontrolled/pioneered parking is degrading the upland vegetation causing additional sedimentation into the river and generating a lot of particulate (dust) causing health and safety issues for campers and people using the site, and results in compaction of the soil making revegetation less likely. Alternative C mitigates both of these issues.

- 1c. No unique geologic or physical features will be modified or impacted by this project.
- 1d. Not allowing continued lateral erosion by the river at this location may result in potential downstream channel alterations. Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) land abuts our FAS downstream from Russell Gates Memorial. The use of rocks and willow

\* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.

\*\* Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

\*\*\* Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

\*\*\*\* Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.



plantings are placed in such as way to dissipate the energy of the water flow along the site and is designed to mitigate the potential problem and reduce net impacts.

The bank stabilization in Alternative C will help prevent future bank erosion and sediment transport. Alternative B doesn't include funding for stabilization work. Reclaiming the pioneered boat ramps and putting in a new gravel boat ramp in a better location will also have a positive impact on the current erosion at the site.

<b>2. <u>AIR</u></b> <b>Will the proposed action result in:</b>	<b>IMPACT *</b>				<b>Can Impact Be Mitigated *</b>	<b>Comment Index</b>
	<b>Unknown *</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>Minor *</b>	<b>Potentially Significant</b>		
a. **Emission of air pollutants or deterioration of ambient air quality? (Also see 13 (c).)			X		YES	2a.
b. Creation of objectionable odors?		X				
c. Alteration of air movement, moisture, or temperature patterns or any change in climate, either locally or regionally?		X				
d. Adverse effects on vegetation, including crops, due to increased emissions of pollutants?		X				
e. ***For P-R/D-J projects, will the project result in any discharge, which will conflict with federal or state air quality regs? (Also see 2a.)		NA				

- 2a. During the construction work in both Alternatives B and C, temporary amounts of dust may be generated during the soil excavation and placement in the flood plain. If additional materials are needed off-site, loading at the source site will generate minor amounts of dust. Alternative B would temporarily result in more dust due to the new road that would be put in for that design. See Appendix 6 for the preliminary concept site plan for the preferred Alternative C. FWP follows the Best Management Practices (BMP's) during all phases of construction to minimize risks and reduce dust. See Appendix 5 for the BMP's.

Alternative A (no action) does not correct the dust and particulate issues at the campsites. A large quantity of dust is generated by day-use vehicle traffic passing through the camping area causing health and safety issues for humans and contributing to fine sediments into the river.

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3. <b>WATER</b>  Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. *Discharge into surface water or any alteration of surface water quality including but not limited to temperature, dissolved oxygen or turbidity?			X		YES	3a.
b. Changes in drainage patterns or the rate and amount of surface runoff?		X				
c. Alteration of the course or magnitude of floodwater or other flows?			X			3c.
d. Changes in the amount of surface water in any water body or creation of a new water body?		X				
e. Exposure of people or property to water related hazards such as flooding?		X				
f. Changes in the quality of groundwater?		X				
g. Changes in the quantity of groundwater?		X				
h. Increase in risk of contamination of surface or groundwater?			X		YES	3h.
i. Effects on any existing water right or reservation?		X				
j. Effects on other water users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quality?		X				
k. Effects on other users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quantity?		X				
l. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project affect a designated floodplain? (Also see 3c.)		NA				
m. ***For P-R/D-J, will the project result in any discharge that will affect federal or state water quality regulations? (Also see 3a.)		NA				

- 3a. The ramp work and stabilization work in both Alternatives B and C would cause temporary and minor amounts of turbidity during bank sloping and rock revetment construction. Construction is planned during low flow to ensure minimal impact.
- 3c. The long-term effects of diverting water flow away from this bank would positively impact (lessen) erosion at this site but also may influence the downstream river channel. The position of various river bends and sequence of pools and riffles should slow the stream velocity and as a result should have limited impact on the channel form. Erosion controlling willows and rock revetment along the site should mitigate potential problems; however, it is difficult to predict the effect of diverting the water flow.
- Furthermore, redirecting human use off the pioneered boat launches and onto the new boat launch will reduce the human impacts to the riparian vegetation and decrease silt introduced into the river during high flow periods.
- 3h. FWP follows the Best Management Practices during all phases of construction to minimize sediment delivery to the river. See Appendix 5 for the BMP's.

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<b>4. <u>VEGETATION</u></b>  <b>Will the proposed action result in?</b>	<b>IMPACT *</b>				<b>Can Impact Be Mitigated*</b>	<b>Comment Index</b>
	<b>Unknown *</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>Minor *</b>	<b>Potentially Significant</b>		
a. Changes in the diversity, productivity or abundance of plant species (including trees, shrubs, grass, crops, and aquatic plants)?			X		Positive	4a.
b. Alteration of a plant community?			X			4b.
c. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				4c.
d. Reduction in acreage or productivity of any agricultural land?		X				
e. Establishment or spread of noxious weeds?			X		YES	4e.
f. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project affect wetlands, or prime and unique farmland?		NA				

- 4a. Stabilization and revegetation of the riverbank will require seeding or sod placement altering the diversity of the plant community on the site. Whereas most of the area being stabilized is presently a vertical cut bank adjacent to a road, any plant additions such as grasses and willows will improve the present mix of native and introduced species. Species known to exist on site primarily includes willows, red osier dogwood, wild roses and grasses but also includes areas of noxious weeds including spotted knapweed, leafy spurge, Canada thistle, yellow toadflax, oxeye daisy, houndstongue, sulfur cinquefoil, St. Johnswort and meadow hawkweed. Riparian habitat will be increased with the stabilization of the bank and reclamation of the pioneered boat ramp. Alternative C includes both stabilization and reclamation but Alternative B only includes reclamation.

Both Alternatives B and C provide designated parking areas that will positively impact the vegetation by preventing continued degradation of the vegetation that has resulted from the haphazard indiscriminate parking along the road and under the trees. A minimal number of trees may be removed to provide open space for additional parking and some upland grassland vegetation may be removed from the parking area, but overall will positively impact vegetation, by restricting parking to designated areas. Alternative B requires a new road to the parking area and would result in a greater loss of native vegetation than for Alternative C. If no action is taken (Alternative A) the indiscriminate haphazard parking would continue to degrade vegetation in the area and is more likely to increase the spread of noxious weeds.

- 4b. This area is characterized by open stands of ponderosa pine and open prairies. Mixed grasses including horsetails and a variety of shrubs dominate the prairie vegetation. Along the river wetlands include various willow species, alder, aspen, birch, cottonwoods, wild roses, snowberry, silverberry, serviceberry, red osier dogwood, sedges and grasses. Evergreens above the wetlands include ponderosa pine, Douglas fir and Rocky Mountain juniper. Bluebunch wheatgrass, Idaho fescue and pinegrass are common but spotted knapweed is also seen throughout. Other noxious weeds identified during the site visit included toadflax, leafy spurge, sulfur cinquefoil, houndstongue, Canada thistle, and oxeye daisy. FWP staff previously identified St. Johnswort and meadow hawkweed on

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the property. Plants seen during the site visit include lupine, sticky geraniums, goldenrod, bedstraw, evening primrose, fleabane, salsify, wild iris, wild licorice, yarrow, and nodding onion. Also seen were Oregon grape, kinnick kinnick, and lambs ear. Because the public already uses the property, the proposed work should not significantly impact the plant community and should help protect the existing ground cover. For both Alternatives B and C reclamation and revegetation with the boat ramp should actually improve the vegetation through site protection measures including signage and designated parking should have a positive impact by not allowing indiscriminate vehicle parking. The stabilization work provided in Alternative C provides additional protection to the plant community by preventing continued erosion at the site.

- 4c. A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program's (MNHP) species of concern database found no vascular or non-vascular plants of significance within the boundaries of the Russell Gates Memorial FAS. Howell's Gumweed (*Grindelia howellii*) was identified in the report in this general area, but not on the property (see Appendix 2 for the Species of Concern report) and is considered sensitive status by USFS and BLM. Statewide is ranked potentially at risk because of limited and/or potentially declining numbers, range, and/or habitat, making it vulnerable to global extinction or extirpation in the state, even though it is abundant in some areas in the Ovando valley. But globally it is potentially at risk and is not vulnerable in most of its range. Howell's Gumweed is a species of concern in Montana but not listed as a threatened species. Invasive weeds are a threat to many occurrences, as the habitat occupied by Howell's Gumweed is also favorable for many weedy species. Application of herbicides to control these weeds, especially along roadsides may also have a direct, negative impact.
- 4e. This property currently has infestations of spotted knapweed, toadflax, leafy spurge, Canada thistle, and sulfur cinquefoil, with some hounds tongue and oxeye daisy. Previously identified at this site were St. Johnswort and meadow hawkweed. The Missoula County Weed District estimates 10-20% of the site infested with noxious weeds. The proposed project establishing a stable riverbank will reduce the disturbed soil areas, which are often exploited by noxious weeds. FWP utilizes the Statewide Integrated Noxious Weed Management Plan to control the noxious weeds on the property by using chemical, biological and mechanical methods in conjunction with the Missoula County Weed District and the Blackfoot Challenge. An aggressive weed management program will facilitate the restoration of native vegetation. Adding designated parking spaces will help deter motorized vehicles from using the road edges and other open space for parking, which disturbs the natural vegetation and results in the spread of weeds. Informative signage around the new ramp and the riverbank stabilization revegetation should also help prevent the spread of weeds. See Figure 4 on the next page for the FWP Weed Inventory Map conducted in 2009.

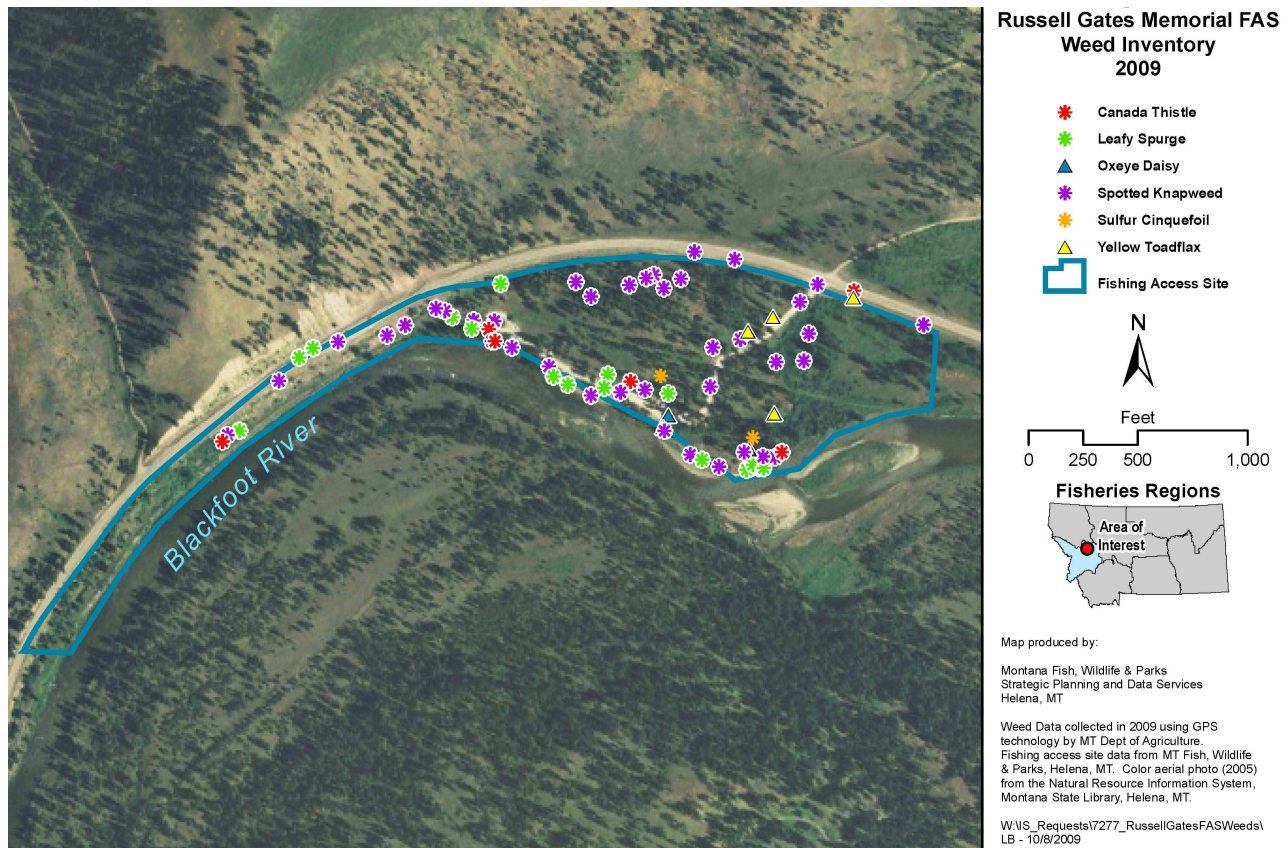
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Figure 4: Russell Gates Memorial FAS FWP Weed Inventory 2009



- \* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.
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<b>** 5. FISH/WILDLIFE</b>  <b>Will the proposed action result in:</b>	<b>IMPACT *</b>				<b>Can Impact Be Mitigated *</b>	<b>Comment Index</b>
	<b>Unknown *</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>Minor *</b>	<b>Potentially Significant</b>		
a. Deterioration of critical fish or wildlife habitat?			X			5a.
b. Changes in the diversity or abundance of game animals or bird species?		X				5b.
c. Changes in the diversity or abundance of nongame species?			X			5c.
d. Introduction of new species into an area?		X				
e. Creation of a barrier to the migration or movement of animals?		X				
f. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				5f.
g. Increase in conditions that stress wildlife populations or limit abundance (including harassment, legal or illegal harvest or other human activity)?		X				5g.
h. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project be performed in any area in which T&E species are present, and will the project affect any T&E species or their habitat? (Also see 5f.)		NA				
i. ***For P-R/D-J, will the project introduce or export any species not presently or historically occurring in the receiving location? (Also see 5d.)		NA				

5a. For both Alternatives B and C, the improvements planned for Russell Gates Memorial FAS are designed to minimize impacts to critical wildlife habitat for the eagles in the area, discussed in further detail in 5f below. Local deer populations may impact some of the willow plantings and other vegetation, however adding signs may help keep people from impacting any new plantings until they take hold. A minimal number of trees may be removed for the designated parking lot, but every effort will be made to preserve all large trees and to keep adequate habitat to ensure that preferred eagle nesting and feeding habitat characteristics are maintained. Additional planting of screening and barrier vegetation will fill gaps in native vegetation. Revegetation of the bank should improve the habitat for species in the area. This stretch of the Blackfoot is not considered critical fish habitat although the waters upstream are critical but the proposed work will not impact the river upstream.

5b/c. No change in the diversity or abundance of game animals or bird species is expected for either Alternatives B or C. The improvements planned are designed to minimize and enhance the impact to the eagles in the area and is discussed in detail in 5f below. Over 200 species have been documented on or near the Russell Gates Memorial FAS. Located immediately across from Russell Gates is the 50,000-acre Blackfoot Clearwater Wildlife Management Area, which has high seasonal concentrations of big game and

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\*\* Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

\*\*\* Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

\*\*\*\* Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.



their predators. Black bears use the area and the precautions to maintain sanitary food and garbage storage are posted at the FAS. Improving the site is intended to help meet the current use and not to the extent of increasing recreational use at the site. It is a popular site for floaters and campers and the better separation of day-use and overnight use and the improved boat ramp and increased parking opportunities will enhance the visitor experience at the site, but is not expected to increase use at the site. More use on the river may impact waterfowl, but the amount of work at the site is not expected to increase use. Riparian habitat provides critical habitat for many species of songbirds and supports a higher density and diversity of birds than any other habitat. Improved riparian habitat will help non-game species.

- 5f. A search of the Natural Resources Information System provided by the Montana Natural Heritage Program showed that no endangered species are in the vicinity of the property. However, the property is potential habitat for bull trout (federally classified as threatened) and westslope cutthroat trout, bald eagle, peregrine falcon, Lewis's woodpecker, black-backed woodpecker, great gray owl, gray wolf, fisher, wolverine, and Canada lynx (classified threatened federally). The FWP R2 Wildlife Biologist, Jay Kolbe has no concerns with the project impacting wildlife in the area. FWP Non-game Wildlife Biologist, Kristi DuBois has been actively involved with the design of the project to ensure the protection of the eagle nest in the area. She explains that high levels of recreational floating and fishing are present at Russell Gates FAS and that current activity levels have been tolerated by the nesting bald eagles, probably because 1) most of it is predictable and consistent from year to year, 2) recreational use is lowest in late winter and early spring when the eagles are the most sensitive (during the egg incubation period), and 3) most of the human activity in the FAS is not visible from the nest due to heavy vegetative screening.

The FWP Furbearer Coordinator Brian Giddings notes it is unlikely that the fisher, wolverine (both classified sensitive) and Canada lynx (classified threatened) pass through this parcel with the proximity of the river to the highway, so it is not likely habitat.

FWP Wolf Management Specialist Liz Bradley identified three wolf packs in the Blackfoot valley in the general vicinity, though she notes wolves from these packs have never been located on Russell Gates Memorial FAS. The Belmont pack (10 wolves estimated) located around the Belmont Creek area, south of Placid Lake. The Elevation Mountain pack (two adults and three pups), have a territory that extends from the Hoodoos south of Helmville over into the foothills west of Helmville and the Chamberlain Creek areas. The Ovando Mountain pack (three adults and four pups) have a territory on and around the Ovando Mountain area north of Ovando including the North fork of the Blackfoot and Monture Creek drainages. Dispersing single wolves are a common occurrence on the Montana landscape and can show up anytime/any place. The gray wolf may use this parcel as a travel corridor but it is unlikely they reside on the property and the proposed work should not impact the wolves.

Native species of the Blackfoot watershed along this area are bull trout (federally threatened species), westslope cutthroat trout, mountain whitefish, pigmy whitefish, longnose sucker, largescale sucker, northern pikeminnow, peamouth, redbelly shiner, longnose dace, slimy sculpin and mottled sculpin. Non-native species include rainbow trout, brown trout, brook

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\*\* Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

\*\*\* Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

\*\*\*\* Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

trout, and white sucker. Ron Pierce, the FWP fisheries biologist identified there may be minor short-term impact to the fish during the stabilization, but would be minor and temporary, and once the bank is stabilized should not impact the fishery.

Please see Appendix 2 Montana Natural History Program (MNHP) Native Species Report for more information on these species.

- 5g. The land is currently used by the public for camping, as well as fishing and floating and boating. Only non-motorized boats are permitted on this river. The stabilization of the riverbank should not increase negative conditions that stress wildlife populations and should have a neutral impact on the fishery.

To avoid disturbance to the eagles that nest in the area, both Alternative B and Alternative C modifications to the Russell Gates FAS have been designed to not increase human activity levels in the area upstream of the FAS, to discourage foot traffic from the FAS along the river upstream towards the eagle nest, to maintain the vegetative screening in the upland bench area between the nest and the FAS, and to maintain and increase the vegetative screening along the river shoreline between the proposed boat launch and the eagle nest. To accomplish this, new parking areas and boat ramp have been placed in such a way to minimize the amount of vegetation that needs to be removed. Signs (when/where appropriate) will be placed along the upstream edge of the boat launch area to protect the vegetation from trampling by discouraging people from walking upstream along the shoreline. These would be placed in such a way as to not create hazards to floaters during high water. Also, future bank restoration efforts will include additional cottonwood and willow planting in the area upstream from the boat launch, to provide additional screening between human activities and the eagle nest.

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\*\* Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

\*\*\* Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

\*\*\*\* Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

## B. HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

6. <u>NOISE/ELECTRICAL EFFECTS</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. Increases in existing noise levels?			X			6a.
b. Exposure of people to severe or nuisance noise levels?			X			6b.
c. Creation of electrostatic or electromagnetic effects that could be detrimental to human health or property?		X				
d. Interference with radio or television reception and operation?		X				

- 6a. Construction equipment will cause a temporary increase in noise levels at this site for both Alternatives B and C. Proximity to the highway, and its much higher sustained noise levels, will likely mask any increase in noise level at the construction site.
- 6b. If construction noise levels exceed a level deemed unsafe over a workday time frame, all workers will be required to wear proper ear protection. FWP will follow the Best Management Practices during all phases of construction to minimize risks. See Appendix 5 for BMP's.

7. <u>LAND USE</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. Alteration of or interference with the productivity or profitability of the existing land use of an area?		X				
b. Conflicted with a designated natural area or area of unusual scientific or educational importance?		X				
c. Conflict with any existing land use whose presence would constrain or potentially prohibit the proposed action?		X				
d. Adverse effects on or relocation of residences?		X				

For both Alternatives B and C the proposed ramp and for Alternative C the stabilization work would not alter or interfere with the productivity or profitability of the existing land use and is intended to prevent further erosion to the bank and prevent loss of the road and/or loss of campsites along the bank. There may be a temporary inconvenience during the proposed improvements adding designated parking in addition to the proposed ramp and for Alternative C, the stabilization work. The land is in a floodplain and wetland riparian area that serves as important habitat for a variety of mammal, bird and fish species. See also 5f and 5g Fish/Wildlife comments in previous section.

\* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.

\*\* Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

\*\*\* Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

\*\*\*\* Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.



8. <b>RISK/HEALTH HAZARDS</b>	<b>IMPACT *</b>				<b>Can Impact Be Mitigated *</b>	<b>Comment Index</b>
	<b>Unknown *</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>Minor *</b>	<b>Potentially Significant</b>		
<b>Will the proposed action result in:</b>						
a. Risk of an explosion or release of hazardous substances (including, but not limited to oil, pesticides, chemicals, or radiation) in the event of an accident or other forms of disruption?			X		YES	8a.
b. Affect an existing emergency response or emergency evacuation plan, or create a need for a new plan?		X				
c. Creation of any human health hazard or potential hazard?		X				8c.
d. ***For P-R/D-J, will any chemical toxicants be used? (Also see 8a)		NA				

- 8a. FWP already manages for noxious weeds on the property following the Statewide Integrated Noxious Weed Management Plan utilizing a combined method of managing weeds. The use of herbicides would be in compliance with application guidelines and applied by people trained in safe handling techniques. Weeds would also be controlled using mechanical or biological means in certain areas to reduce the risk of chemical spills or water contamination. In addition, the Blackfoot Challenge conducts an annual weed pull at the Russell Gates Memorial FAS. The Blackfoot Challenge is a landowner-based group that coordinates management of the Blackfoot River, its tributaries, and adjacent lands. The proposed project includes revegetation to reduce the spreading of noxious weeds. Weed management will continue for all Alternatives A, B and C, but if no action is taken, the indiscriminate parking increases the spread of the noxious weeds, requiring more weed management than Alternatives B or C.

Operation of heavy equipment proximal to a surface water body presents a temporary potential risk of fuel or lubricating oil release into the surface water for both Alternatives B and C. Contractors would have on site absorbent materials to minimize any hydrocarbon releases, as well as conduct startup inspection of all hydraulic lines and cylinder seals daily to reduce the potential for a release. FWP will follow the Best Management Practices during all phases of construction to minimize risks. See Appendix 5 for BMP's.

- 8c. The stabilization work would have a positive impact by stabilizing the riverbank at Russell Gates Memorial FAS for Alternative C, resulting in less of a risk of a potential hazard than to not stabilize and leave the vertically cut bank that is a result of the erosion. The stabilization work is contingent on the funding available and is not included with Alternative B, due the higher costs associated with that construction. The Alternative C for the upstream work has better assurance that funding is available to stabilize the bank. There will be less risk to visitors than to let the bank continue to erode away resulting in changing unstable soil structure along the bank if no action is taken.

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\*\* Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

\*\*\* Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

\*\*\*\* Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

<b>9. <u>COMMUNITY IMPACT</u></b>  <b>Will the proposed action result in:</b>	<b>IMPACT *</b>				<b>Can Impact Be Mitigated *</b>	<b>Comment Index</b>
	<b>Unknown *</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>Minor *</b>	<b>Potentially Significant</b>		
a. Alteration of the location, distribution, density, or growth rate of the human population of an area?		X				
b. Alteration of the social structure of a community?		X				
c. Alteration of the level or distribution of employment or community or personal income?		X				
d. Changes in industrial or commercial activity?		X				
e. Increased traffic hazards or effects on existing transportation facilities or patterns of movement of people and goods?			X		Positive	9e.

Alternative C upstream work would have a positive impact by preserving the road and campsites along the Blackfoot River at Russell Gates Memorial FAS and providing better separation of overnight and day-use areas developing designated parking to improve traffic hazards and the safety of motorists and recreationists visiting the site. Alternative B does separate the day-use vehicle traffic from the camping, however, floaters need to float past the campers and there is much more road infrastructure required in Alternative B, so may be less desirable from the standpoint of the community impact.

9e. The new boat ramp will be safer than the eroded pioneered boat ramps currently in use that would be replaced in both Alternatives B and C. Alternative C, with the separation of overnight and day use, as well as increased parking should positively improve the visitor experiences by providing designated parking improving traffic flow and safety of vehicles coming in and out of the FAS and the visitors using the site. Alternative B does not provide the same extent of separation of day use and camping areas so does not facilitate the pattern of movement of people using the site as well as Alternative C.

\* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.

\*\* Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

\*\*\* Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

\*\*\*\* Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

<b>10. PUBLIC SERVICES/TAXES/UTILITIES</b>  <b>Will the proposed action result in:</b>	<b>IMPACT *</b>				<b>Can Impact Be Mitigated *</b>	<b>Comment Index</b>
	<b>Unknown *</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>Minor *</b>	<b>Potentially Significant</b>		
a. Will the proposed action have an effect upon or result in a need for new or altered governmental services in any of the following areas: fire or police protection, schools, parks/recreational facilities, roads or other public maintenance, water supply, sewer or septic systems, solid waste disposal, health, or other governmental services? If any, specify:		X				
b. Will the proposed action have an effect upon the local or state tax base and revenues?		X				10b.
c. Will the proposed action result in a need for new facilities or substantial alterations of any of the following utilities: electric power, natural gas, other fuel supply or distribution systems, or communications?		X				
d. Will the proposed action result in increased use of any energy source?		X				
e. **Define projected revenue sources		X				
f. **Define projected maintenance costs.						10f.

10b No change in tax base as FWP pays property taxes in an amount equal to that of a private individual.

10e Both Alternatives B and C will improve parking and add a new gravel boat ramp in a better location, however Alternative C will add a latrine and has funding to stabilize a section of the riverbank of the Blackfoot River at Russell Gates Memorial FAS. The campsite fees are currently \$12 without a fishing license, \$7 with a fishing license and ½ price for Montana residents over age 62. In Alternative C, campsite #1 will be eliminated as would be too dusty and busy next to the entrance road to function as a campsite, but would modify the current day use parking area into a replacement campsite for #1, resulting in no net change. Estimated annual visitation in 2008 for Russell Gates Memorial FAS is 25,000 visitors [includes both day-use and campground]. Day-use visitors are estimated to comprise 92% of the visitors at the site of which 78% are resident and 22% non-resident. Camping revenue collected in 2008 was \$4,820 from 625 camping fee envelopes with an estimated 2,000 visitors camping. Also estimated from vehicle license plates listed on the fee envelopes 65% of campers were residents, 35% were non-residents.

10f. The maintenance costs for this property involve a weed management estimation of \$650 per year from the FWP Region 2 maintenance budget (total maintenance for Russell Gates is \$2,700). No additional costs are budgeted at this time for on-going maintenance of the stabilization and no additional costs associated with the stabilization are expected.

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\*\* Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

\*\*\* Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

\*\*\*\* Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

<b>** 11. <u>AESTHETICS/RECREATION</u></b>  <b>Will the proposed action result in:</b>	<b>IMPACT *</b>				<b>Can Impact Be Mitigated *</b>	<b>Comment Index</b>
	<b>Unknown *</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>Minor *</b>	<b>Potentially Significant</b>		
a. Alteration of any scenic vista or creation of an aesthetically offensive site or effect that is open to public view?			X		YES	11a.
b. Alteration of the aesthetic character of a community or neighborhood?		X				
c. **Alteration of the quality or quantity of recreational/tourism opportunities and settings? (Attach Tourism Report.)		X				11c.
d. ***For P-R/D-J, will any designated or proposed wild or scenic rivers, trails or wilderness areas be impacted? (Also see 11a, 11c.)		NA				

11a. For Alternative C, the stabilization work will be in public view from along the bank. The rock utilized in the stabilization will be the larger river rock and boulders currently seen in the area to keep with the current aesthetics of the area. Reclamation of the vegetation using willow sprigs and other native plants will help stabilize the soil in the area and will be more aesthetically pleasing than the rock alone. Over time, the establishment of woody shrubs along the stream margin will significantly contribute to the erosion resistance of the river channel. While stabilization of this relatively short reach of river likely will have little impact on overall fish populations, enhancement efforts are expected to attract fish, prevent continued erosion into the river and reduce sediment input in a localized area in addition to protecting the campsites and access road to the campsites at Russell Gates Memorial FAS. Alternative B does not have funding for the stabilization work, so the bank would remain vertically cut from the erosion. Alternative B will also require development of currently undeveloped upland area visible from Highway 200.

11c. The stabilization proposed in Alternative C will protect the access road and campsites along this section of the Blackfoot River at Russell Gates Memorial. Alternatives A and B provide no stabilization putting the access road and campsites at risk of continued erosion and leaves the longevity of the site in continual question. The property will continue to be a destination for camping, floating, boating and fishing. See Appendix 4 for the Department of Commerce Tourism Report.

During construction, there will be a temporary inconvenience to the general public using the site including outfitters that use the boat ramp. However, those needing access to the river during the construction can use the Scotty Brown Bridge FAS 1.5 miles upstream of Russell Gates Memorial FAS and Sperry Grade boat ramp 1-mile down stream. Furthermore, after the work is completed, the users of the site are expected to benefit from the better separation of the camping area from the day-use area.

\* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.

\*\* Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

\*\*\* Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

\*\*\*\* Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

<b>12. CULTURAL/HISTORICAL RESOURCES</b>  <b>Will the proposed action result in:</b>	<b>IMPACT *</b>				<b>Can Impact Be Mitigated *</b>	<b>Comment Index</b>
	<b>Unknown *</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>Minor *</b>	<b>Potentially Significant</b>		
a. **Destruction or alteration of any site, structure or object of prehistoric, historic, or paleontological importance?		X				12a
b. Physical change that would affect unique cultural values?		X				
c. Effects on existing religious or sacred uses of a site or area?		X				
d. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project affect historic or cultural resources? Attach SHPO letter of clearance. (Also see 12.a.)		NA				

12a.

Multiple cultural resource inventories have identified areas of cultural significance in the project vicinity. In consideration of these findings, FWP proposes to add parking at areas clear of known cultural resources. Additional cultural survey work is built into the cost estimates for both Alternative B and preferred Alternative C. The riverbank stabilization may require movement of some of the soil and rocks along the bank for Alternative C. If cultural materials are discovered during the project, work will cease and SHPO will be contacted for a more in depth investigation. See Appendix 3 for the SHPO letter of clearance.

\* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.

\*\* Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

\*\*\* Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

\*\*\*\* Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.



## SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

13. <u>SUMMARY EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE</u>  Will the proposed action, considered as a whole:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. Have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? (A project or program may result in impacts on two or more separate resources that create a significant effect when considered together or in total.)	X					13a.
b. Involve potential risks or adverse effects, which are uncertain but extremely hazardous if they were to occur?		X				
c. Potentially conflict with the substantive requirements of any local, state, or federal law, regulation, standard or formal plan?		X				
d. Establish a precedent or likelihood that future actions with significant environmental impacts will be proposed?		X				
e. Generate substantial debate or controversy about the nature of the impacts that would be created?		X				
f. ***For P-R/D-J, is the project expected to have organized opposition or generate substantial public controversy? (Also see 13e.)		X				
g. ****For P-R/D-J, list any federal or state permits required.		X				

13a. Both Alternatives B and C would improve accessibility with designated parking and better separation of day-use and camping, as well as an improved gravel ramp in a better location and reclamation of the pioneered ramps. Alternative C includes stabilization work to reduce erosion and sediment and to protect the roadway and campsites along the riverbank. The long-term effect of stopping this lateral migration is unknown but is likely to have limited impact on the channel form. The energy dissipating rock revetment and erosion controlling willows along the site should mitigate potential problems, however, it is difficult to predict the effect of diverting the water flow. The objective of the stabilization is to direct the water back to the main channel of the river rather than allowing it to continue to erode the bank, leaving the roadway and campsites at risk, if no action is taken to stabilize this stretch of the river. FWP evaluated taking no action to stabilize and other alternatives to stop the erosion and has selected a more natural approach using river rock and boulders currently in the area rather than a more engineered approach such as rip-rap using a wall of big rocks and concrete to stop the erosion. The stabilization may impact the island created from the force of the river across from the FAS.

The cumulative effects of stabilization are unclear. According to the FWP Fisheries Biologist, the proposed work should have a neutral effect on the fishery. The public will have access regardless of this project, but the access road and some campsites may be in jeopardy without it, if Alternatives A or B are chosen. This project, on balance, does not improve aquatic habitat, but will improve the riparian habitat. Riparian habitat provides critical habitat for many species of songbirds and any improvement in riparian habitat would positively impact non-game species.

\* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.

\*\* Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

\*\*\* Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

\*\*\*\* Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

### **PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT**

The proposed work will have no negative cumulative effects on the physical and human environments. When considered over the long-term, the proposed improvements pose significant positive effects towards the public's continued access of a scenic recreation area of the Blackfoot River. The benefits of the proposed work in Alternative C best meet the objectives of FWP managing these important resources to assure the safety of visitors, as well as resource protection, enhancement, and maintenance.

The minor impacts that were identified in the previous section are small in scale and will not influence the overall environment of the immediate area. The natural environment will continue to exist to provide habitat to migratory and permanent wildlife species and will continue to be open to the public for access to the river for bank fishing, floating and boating activities, and camping. The design of the improvements in both Alternatives B and C provide better separation of the day-use and camping at the site to reduce potential conflicts between visitors and develops designated parking to better meet the current use, without necessarily increasing capacity and should ease congestion, reduce dust and eliminate indiscriminate haphazard parking along the road and the degradation of native vegetation. Preferred Alternative C further separates day-use from camping with the addition of a latrine and floaters would not have to float past the campers to get to the boat ramp, since the ramp is upstream instead of downstream.

Alternative C includes bank stabilization to help ensure soil stability along the bank and will provide a safer environment for recreationists camping along the river and protects the access road and campsites along the river. The stabilization work will have minimal impact on the local wildlife species that frequent the property. Revegetation of the bank and reclamation of the pioneered ramps would minimize erosion problems and sediment delivery to the river and should improve the habitat for species in the area.

A search of the Natural Resources Information System (See Appendix 2) provided by the Montana Natural Heritage Program showed that no endangered species are in the vicinity of the property. However, the property is potential habitat for bull trout (federally classified as threatened) and westslope cutthroat trout, bald eagle, peregrine falcon, Lewis's woodpecker, black-backed woodpecker, great gray owl, gray wolf, fisher, wolverine, and Canada lynx (classified threatened federally). It is unlikely that the fisher, wolverine and Canada Lynx pass through this parcel with the proximity of the river to the highway; it is not likely habitat. There are three wolf packs that use the area around Russell Gates Memorial FAS but none of these packs have ever been located on the FAS and no known den or rendezvous sites are in the vicinity. The gray wolf may use this parcel as a travel corridor, but it is unlikely they reside on the property. FWP Non-game Wildlife Biologist, Kristi DuBois has been actively involved with the design of the project to ensure the protection of the eagle nest in the area. To prevent disturbance of the eagle's nest in the area, a minimal number of trees will be removed for the designated parking area and new boat ramp, and new vegetation planted.

The Blackfoot River supports several species of fish: bull trout (federally threatened species), westslope cutthroat trout, mountain whitefish, pigmy whitefish, northern pikeminnow, peamouth, redbside shiner, and longnose dace. Non-native species include rainbow trout, brown trout, brook trout, and white sucker. The FWP fisheries biologist for this area identified there may be minor short-term impacts to the fish, but would be minor and temporary. Once the bank is stabilized should have a neutral impact on the fishery.

## **PART IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

### **1. Public Involvement:**

The public will be notified by way of legal notices in the *Helena Independent Record*, the *Missoulian*, the *Seeley Swan Pathfinder* and the *Silver State Post*, in addition to a statewide press release. The Public Notice and the EA will also be posted on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks web page:

<http://fwp.mt.gov/publicnotices> . A direct mailing will be sent to adjacent landowners and interested parties. Additionally, copies will be available at FWP Region 2 Headquarters. This level of public notice and participation is appropriate for a project of this scope having few minor impacts.

If requested within the comment period, the department may arrange a public meeting.

### **2. Duration of comment period.**

A 30-day comment period is proposed as appropriate for the scale of this project. The comment period will extend for 33 days following publication of the first legal notice in area newspapers. Comments will be accepted until 5pm November 30, 2009. Comments should be:

Mailed to: Russell Gates Memorial FAS Improvement Project  
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks  
PO Box 136  
Seeley Lake MT 59868

Emailed to: [clorentz@mt.gov](mailto:clorentz@mt.gov)

## **PART V. EA PREPARATION**

### **1. Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required? NO If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action.**

Based upon the above assessment, which has identified a very limited number of minor impacts from the proposed action and no significant negative impacts from the proposed action, an EIS is not required and an environmental assessment is the appropriate level of review. We conclude from this review that the proposed activities will have a positive impact on the physical and human environment. Positive impacts in this instance are significant and include for the work proposed in Alternative C:

- Designated parking to ease congestion, reduce dust and eliminate indiscriminate haphazard parking along the road and the degradation of native vegetation.
- Separation of day-use and camping areas to reduce the potential for conflicts between visitors.
- Reduced sediment loading along a 180-yard reach of the Blackfoot River.
- Bank stabilization, revegetation, and energy dissipation on this reach of the river.
- Protection of the access road and campsites along the bank at Russell Gates Memorial FAS.

### **2. Person(s) responsible for preparing the EA:**

Chris Lorentz  
FWP Region 2 Park Manager  
PO Box 136  
Seeley Lake MT 59868  
[clorentz@mt.gov](mailto:clorentz@mt.gov)  
406-677-6804

Pam Boggs  
FWP EA Coordinator  
PO Box 200701  
Helena MT 59620-0701  
[pboggs@mt.gov](mailto:pboggs@mt.gov)

**3. List of agencies consulted during preparation of the EA:**

Blackfoot Challenge  
Missoula County Weed District  
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks  
    Parks Division  
        Design and Construction Unit  
    Fish & Wildlife Division  
        Fisheries Bureau  
        Wildlife Bureau  
    Legal Unit  
Montana Department of Commerce – Tourism  
Montana Natural Heritage Program – Natural Resources Information System (NRIS)  
State Historical Preservation Office  
US Fish & Wildlife Service Invasive Species Strike Team (ISST)

**Appendices**

1. HB 495 Project Qualification Checklist
2. Montana Natural Heritage Program (MNHP) Native Species Report
3. State Historic Preservation Office Concurrence Letter
4. Tourism Report Department of Commerce
5. Best Management Practices Final FAS BMP's Department of Fish Wildlife & Parks
6. Draft FWP Upstream Preliminary Concept Plan (Preferred Alternative C)